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The Power of Ahavas Yisrael in Times of Trouble

Tzaddikim throughout the generations, and especially the *talmidim* of the Baal Shem Tov, emphasized *ואהבת לרעך כמוך* as one of the strongest foundations of Yiddishkeit. It protects us in times of trouble, and strengthens all aspects of our *avodas Hashem*.

The *Ma'or VaShemesh* explains a *midrash* that Rashi quotes in the first *pasuk* of *Parshas Nitzavim*.

Why does the *parshah* of *אתם נצבים* immediately follow 'the *parshah* of curses' (the *tochechah* in *Parshas Ki Savo*)? Because the Jewish people heard ninety-eight curses, aside from the forty-nine already stated (in *Parshas Bechukosai*), and they became weak. Then Moshe Rabbeinu began to reassure them, "*אתם נצבים היום - you are standing today*. Even though you have angered Hashem so much, He has not destroyed you; behold, you are here."

The *Ma'or VaShemesh* wonders about the nature of this reassurance. Perhaps they weren't punished, even if they sinned, prior to being warned in *Parshas Ki Savo*, but now, having heard these curses, surely if they ignored them they would be found deserving of punishment. In that case, how does the fact that they weren't punished until now calm their worry?

It seems that Moshe Rabbeinu gave them advice that would enable them to avoid the punishments described in those curses. If *chas v'shalom* they would immediately receive such harsh punishment for each transgression, it would be very difficult for them to survive. Therefore, Moshe Rabbeinu consoled them and provided them with a remedy that would protect them from these curses.

The foremost protection against punishment is *ahavah* and *achdus*.

When there is love, unity, and friendship among the Jews, no retribution can come upon them. As the *pasuk* says, (*Hoshea* 4:17) **חָבוּר לֹו עֲצָבִים אֶפְרַיִם הִנָּח לֹו** – *even if they are attached to idolatry as Ephraim was, as long as they are unified and their hearts are not divided, they will dwell in peace...* and remain far from all curses or suffering. This is the meaning of the *pasuk* **אֲתֵם נֹצְבִים הַיּוֹם כָּלְכֶם לִפְנֵי ה' אֶלְקֵיכֶם רְאֵשֵׁיכֶם שְׁבֻטֵיכֶם זְקֵנֵיכֶם** "Even though you have heard all the curses of *Parshas Ki Savo*, nonetheless, you will stand. You will rise up in the merit of **אֲתֵם נֹצְבִים הַיּוֹם כָּלְכֶם לִפְנֵי ה' אֶלְקֵיכֶם רְאֵשֵׁיכֶם שְׁבֻטֵיכֶם זְקֵנֵיכֶם** – when all are united with one heart, with love: the leaders, the elders, and all Klal Yisrael."

We already find this idea in *Midrash Rabbah* (*Bereishis* 38), which is quoted in the *Ohr Hachaim hakadosh* on *Parshas Haazinu*. The Midrash connects the words **בַּדָּד יִנְחֹו ה'** to the *pasuk* quoted above from *Hoshea* (**חָבוּר לֹו** - *ינחוו* - *הנח לו*), and explains, "When there is unity among them, even if they worship *avodah zarah*, **חָבוּר לֹו** – leave them alone."

Protection from Punishment

Throughout the generations, when people were inspired to do *teshuvah* in times of suffering, the first thing tzaddikim told people to fix was the lack of *achdus* among our people. *Achdus* is the strongest shield that can protect us from retribution.

One of the reasons that unity shields us more than anything else is because it eventually leads to *teshuvah* in all areas. It is important to clarify this point, in order to address people's skepticism about the power of unity. They wonder how *achdus* can give us more protection than anything else, even while serious *aveiros* are still rampant. The answer is that when Jews join together, it causes their *neshamos* to emerge from their hidden state and reveal themselves. Revealed *neshamos* inspire Jews to do *teshuvah*.

We need to highlight this point especially during wartime, when each person seeks protection not just for himself but for all Jews. Each of us wants to save the entire Jewish people, and to bring relief to the *Shechinah*, which is also in *galus* and suffering together with us.

Symptoms Appear in Different Places

Many people are familiar with the teaching of the Zohar *hakadosh* that הוא חד וקב"ה חד הוא - *Yisrael, the Torah, and Hakadosh Baruch Hu are one.*

In a human body, when something goes wrong, the symptoms often appear first and most visibly in some other part of the body. Similarly, in the united reality of Yisrael, the Torah, and Hakadosh Baruch Hu, a problem in one aspect may be most visible in another aspect.

A person may be infected with an illness without being aware of it. One day, his family notices that he's saying things that make no sense, as if he has lost his mind. They rush him to the hospital; the doctors run tests and discover that he is suffering from a serious physical illness, which has affected his speech and cognition.

There may be other symptoms of the same illness, such as exhaustion or muscle weakness. We can't identify the illness just by noticing the symptoms. Only after reviewing the results of tests and examinations can doctors identify the serious illness that is causing all of those symptoms.

Sometimes a person ignores the signs that he is very ill, and goes on with his daily routine until a symptom develops that he can't ignore.

Similarly, a person may discover a serious problem in one of the three connected aspects of ישראל, אורייתא, וקוב"ה. It may present as a problem in Torah, a lack of *Shechinah* in his life, or a crisis in his identity as a Jew.

When he comes face to face with such a serious problem, he recognizes that he must be suffering from a serious illness. He needs to investigate and identify the source of the spiritual illness – just as people check their *mezuzos* at a time of tragedy to see if a word or letter is missing.

Let's try to examine the effects of *ahavas Yisrael* on ישראל, אורייתא, וקודשא בריך הוא.

Unity and Shefa

The Alshich *hakadosh* explains why the *pasuk* 'וְאֶהְיֶה לְרַעַךְ כְּמוֹךְ אֲנִי ה'

concludes with the words 'אֲנִי ה'.

When Bnei Yisrael are in a state of harmony, *ahavah v'achvah*, the four letters of Hashem's Name are united. All the *shefa* that is supposed to descend to this world reaches its destination when the letters of the Name are the way they are meant to be. However, when Bnei Yisrael separate from each other, even the letters of the Name separate, and this negatively affects the *shefa* that is supposed to reach the world.

The Alshich then explains that some *neshamos* have their source in the *middah* of *Chesed*, and others in *middah* of *Gevurah*, and so on. Each *neshamah* has its *middah* which is a root that connects it to Hashem's Name. When all the *neshamos* love each other, the Name is complete, and the different *hanhagos* work together, enabling the flow of *shefa* to the world.

This is the message of the words 'וְאֶהְיֶה לְרַעַךְ כְּמוֹךְ אֲנִי ה' that follow 'וְאֶהְיֶה לְרַעַךְ כְּמוֹךְ אֲנִי ה'. The Torah tells us that 'וְאֶהְיֶה לְרַעַךְ כְּמוֹךְ אֲנִי ה' follows from 'וְאֶהְיֶה לְרַעַךְ כְּמוֹךְ אֲנִי ה'. The state of Hashem's Name depends on the *ahavah* among Klal Yisrael. Division among the Jewish people destroys the world, because the letters of Hashem's Name are separated, and channels of *shefa* are blocked.

This helps us gain a deeper understanding of Chazal's statement that the second *Beis Hamikdash* was destroyed because of *sinas chinam*. The *shefa* that maintained the existence of the *Beis Hamikdash* wasn't able to reach this world once the Jewish people were divided. Only the presence of the *Shechinah* prevents the nations who want to destroy the Jews and the *Beis Hamikdash* from doing so. Only when hatred among Jews caused the *Shechinah* to depart were the nations able to destroy the *Beis Hamikdash* and exile the Jewish people.

The Effect of Unity on the Torah

The Torah also can't influence the world as it is meant to, if Bnei Yisrael are not united. There are a variety of reasons for this. The first

is explained by the *Ohr Hachaim hakadosh* in *Parshas Pekudei*. He explains that every Jew, in order to be complete, needs all 613 mitzvos. We know from Chazal that the mitzvos correspond to the 613 limbs and sinews of the body. If someone lacks one of the mitzvos, the necessary life-force can't reach the corresponding limb or sinew.

Of course, no single Jew can actually fulfill all 613 mitzvos. Some apply only to a *kohen*, and some only to a Yisrael. Some apply only to men and some apply only to women. From the beginning, the plan was that each Jew would keep the mitzvos that apply to him, and together, it will be as if each Jew kept all of the mitzvos.

However, this plan only works if there is *achdus* and *ahavah* among the Jewish people. Without that, there is no way for one Jew to benefit from the mitzvos of another.

The implications of this damage are even more frightening. If Klal Yisrael are not keeping the entire Torah, the existence of the whole world is in danger. As Rashi explains, the word *Bereishis* signifies that the world was created for the Torah (which is called *reishis*). When the Jewish people are divided and unable to benefit from each other's mitzvos, the foundation of the world is compromised.

Quantity and Quality

Sifrei Chassidus explain this principle in greater detail. Rav Avraham of Kalisk, the Toldos Yaakov Yosef, and many others explain that unity is vitally important not only for the quantity of the mitzvos each Jew can access, but for the quality and completeness of the mitzvos. This impact of unity or divisiveness on the quality of mitzvos is even more important than the impact on quantity.

We live in the generation of *ikvesa d'Meshicha*, the period preceding the coming of Mashiach. We learn about the importance of fulfilling mitzvos *lishmah*, with *deveikus* and *mesirus nefesh*, *ahavah* and *yirah*. We certainly accept these ideas in principle, but at the same time, we feel that such aspirations exceed what we can do in our generation. "I'm

sure the great tzaddikim that once lived, or certain unique individuals in our time, keep mitzvos like that. We are simple Jews who just hope to keep the mitzvos as they are. We buy a lulav and esrog, say *L'shem Yichud*, and shake it, and know that we're following the path laid out by Chazal."

We need to face the truth. If the Zohar *hakadosh* states that a mitzvah done without *ahavah* and *yirah* cannot ascend to the heavens, it cannot! It is missing the spiritual ingredients that allow it to ascend. There really is no way around this.

Some may argue that in our generation we have to give people *chizuk* and emphasize that even the weakest mitzvah accomplishes more than we could ever imagine. Even a Jew who knows nothing and understands nothing, who puts on *tefillin* once, has made his entire eighty years of life worthwhile. Questioning this approach can make people feel sad or bitter: "Then what's the point of even trying?"

The optimistic approach is also true, but it doesn't present the complete picture. *זאת התורה לא תהא מוחלפת* - the Torah is eternal, and it doesn't change just because we are limited. If the Torah says that every mitzvah needs to be done with *mesirus nefesh*, that's the reality. If we are honest with ourselves, we realize that it makes sense. We all feel the difference between a *tefillah* that we prepared for and said with *kavanah*, and one that we only mumbled without thought.

So, what are we expected to do? Do we just keep trying our best?

Together: B'shem Kol Yisrael

In a letter, Rav Avraham of Kalisk explains that this is what *וְאֶהְיֶה לָהֶם* is meant to accomplish. Each of us has different levels of emotion and understanding in *avodas Hashem*. That is why we must all unite in *ahavah* and *achvah*, as one family. That unity enables all our mitzvos to ascend as they were meant to.

For example, the *halachah* instructs us to daven together with a *tzibbur* in a *shul*. If we pay attention, we notice that our *tefillos* are also

composed in the plural: רפאנו, השיבנו. Everyone davens for everyone else, even if they don't consciously remember that.

The *Chayei Adam* (brought as *halachah l'maaseh* in the *Mishnah Berurah*) states that even though the *halachah* dictates that a *mitzvah d'Oraisa* must be done with *kavanah* in order to fulfill our obligation, someone who says *Krias Shema* in shul as part of his davening is considered to have said *Krias Shema* with *kavanah*, even if his mind was elsewhere.

The rationale is that he came to *shul* to fulfill the Torah's mitzvos, such as *Krias Shema* and *tefillin*. He also came to daven together with other Jews. Even if he didn't actually say, "*Hineni muchan u'mezuman* – I am hereby prepared to fulfill the mitzvah of לרעך כמוך, and I will daven together with my brethren," still, that is what he accomplished.

This always holds true. When Jews daven together, or dance together at *simchas beis ha'shoeivah*, they unite, because the mitzvos were never meant to be kept by isolated individuals.

On the one hand, we always need to remember that Hakadosh Baruch Hu loves our mitzvos and accepts them, and that our *avodah*, with all of its shortcomings, is still greater than anything done by the *malachim*. On the other hand, we also have to remember why that is true – it is only because we do mitzvos בשם כל ישראל, uniting with other Jews.

The moment a person separates himself from Klal Yisrael, that encouraging thought no longer applies. A Jew cannot hope to succeed on his own. The בשם כל ישראל aspect of our mitzvos is essential to each individual's Jewish identity, and essential to the completeness of our Torah and mitzvos.

Everyone Needs Everyone

Many tzaddikim have said that in the final generation it is possible that our primary *avodah* will be the difficult task of loving every Jew. That will bring about the *geulah*.

Many *talmidim* of the Baal Shem Tov who were *baalei ruach hakodesh* expressed this idea. However, we can understand our generation's need for unity even on a very practical level. *Baruch Hashem*, we live in a time when the number of frum Jews is growing. At the same time, there are fewer and fewer Jews who encompass the entire Torah.

We have a *kollel* that learns the *halachos* of *challah* in great depth, and another that learns *muktzah*. There are *kollelim* that focus on monetary halachah and others that delve into the Yerushalmi *Seder Zeraim*.

We understand that a *talmid chacham* who studies one topic *b'iyun*, and writes *chiddushim* in that area, usually isn't what Chazal describe as a *talmid chacham*, i.e., able to answer questions in any and every area of Torah. But if we unite as one, alongside our constant efforts to improve the quality and quantity of our learning – then everyone's Torah joins together and forms a complete "*talmid chacham*."

Everyone recognizes that there are areas of Torah that he will probably never learn in his lifetime, at least not in depth. Rather than shrug our shoulders and accept our limitations, we should realize that there is another option: becoming a *chelek* of Klal Yisrael. Then, together with everyone else, we will be learning every part of the Torah.

Sharing Mesirus Nefesh

In *Maseches Brachos*, Chazal said that even if we have thirteen yeshivos learning the complex *mishnayos* of *Maseches Uktzin*, if there is a lack of *mesirus nefesh* (self-sacrifice), the ability of our *tefillos* to be accepted will be impaired.

Each of us needs to have *mesirus nefesh* for every aspect of Torah, and for every mitzvah. Obviously, that is beyond the reach of any individual. There are so many forms of *mesirus nefesh*. Some people are *moser nefesh* to focus entirely on learning Torah without worrying about mundane matters. Others are *moser nefesh* for Torah by going out to work, and basing each of their decisions on *halachah* not matter how difficult that may be.

If we gather all the good deeds of every Jew, and all of the challenges they had to overcome, they become a united picture of complete *avodas Hashem*. A young *bachur's* battle with his *nisyonos*, the struggles of a young couple, and the adult's more developed *emunah*, all combine to form a beautiful mosaic of *mesirus nefesh*. We all need to contribute to that picture, and we can all benefit from it, as long as there is *achdus*.

Even the greatest violinist in the world can't play a symphony. He needs all the other instruments in the orchestra.

Someone who understands this realizes that there is no alternative to *achdus*. We all need each other in order to fulfill our obligation to learn the entire Torah and keep all the mitzvos with *mesirus nefesh*.

Joint Forces

We can compare Klal Yisrael to the armed forces of a country. Those forces include very different units, such as infantry, air force, navy, intelligence, and so on. If a country hopes to win a war, all of those forces need to work together. The intelligence division enables the infantry to choose the best location for an attack, the air force provides cover, and the navy launches a simultaneous attack from the sea. They can only succeed if they combine, supporting and communicating with each other. Without that unity and cooperation, even the most powerfully armed country won't be able to defeat its enemies.

We also see that every country tries to form alliances with other countries. No nation wants to stand alone with no allies. Countries often spend billions to create those ties. Each country benefits from shared information and the ability to face enemies with a united front.

Klal Yisrael has to apply the lessons of military success to Torah and mitzvos. We also have many different forces and divisions, although we all have the same Torah and mitzvos.

One 'division' specializes in the topic of *tznius*. They are a community of three thousand who, along with their regular learning, have concentrated on understanding every statement of Chazal on the

topic of *tznius*. They have learned the power of *tznius*, and the *brachah* that it brings. They are even a repository of stories about *tznius*. This 'division' has gained their expertise by extensive training. Their Rav has taught and reviewed this topic with them continually. The light of *tznius* that they revealed helped them form a special connection to Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

However, all the other units in the army also need to access that power in order to succeed in their tasks. One battalion is trained in *gemilus chasadim* and another in *kiruv rechokim*. There are endless divisions in our army, because the Torah is infinite. Each specialty is like a particular weapon that can help Klal Yisrael emerge victorious.

No one division can win the war by itself. We need everyone's contributions in order to defeat our enemies.

Rav Avraham of Kalisk explained Chazal's statement, כל ישראל ערבים זה לזה, as an instruction to be מעורב - mixed together. We all need to share with everyone else.

Revealing Your Neshamah By Giving

So far, we have addressed the importance of *achdus* in the realm of Torah, and Hakadosh Baruch Hu's presence among us. Now we need to speak about Yisrael, the third branch of the unified triumvirate, ישראל אורייתא וקוב"ה חד הוא.

Each Jew's *neshamah* wants to reveal itself and become the reigning power in every aspect of a Jew's life. Each *neshamah* that is revealed brings more *hashra'as haShechinah* to the world. We learn that *gaavah*, arrogance, increases the dominance of a person's physical aspect. This causes the departure of the *Shechinah*, because the *Shechinah* cannot dwell where the *neshamah* isn't revealed. Fortunately, the reverse is also true. When we overcome our arrogance, the *neshamah* reveals itself, and allows the *Shechinah* to dwell in the vicinity of that *neshamah*.

It's clear that when someone gives to others, thinks about others, cares about others and forgets his own needs, he strengthens his

neshamah and weakens the dominance of his physicality. (It is of course possible for someone to love others because he loves himself, but that isn't true *ahavas Yisrael*.)

True *ahavas Yisrael* demands that a Jew will set aside not only his own physical needs, but even his spiritual needs in order to help another Jew. Instead of thinking about himself, he will think about others, and do what he can to help them. When he is involved in true giving, without taking, his *neshamah* is revealed, making it easier for him to connect with others.

Imagine two people who are wearing heavy layers of clothing that cover them from head to toe. They don't recognize each other and can't work together. Once they take off the masks that cover their faces, they smile and shake hands. "Ah, it's you! I didn't know. *Shalom aleichem*."

When someone is self-centered and only works for his own benefit, it's as if he says, "Don't bother me with other people's problems; I need to take care of myself." Tzaddikim have taught us that even if he is focused on his spiritual needs, his self-centeredness is negative, because he doesn't think about others or even see them. As the saying goes, "He can't see anyone else even if they are standing right in front of him."

Only when he removes his 'armor,' devoting his mind, heart, and strength to giving, does his *neshamah* emerge, enabling him to meet other people. As he gives to another, both of their *neshamos* are revealed, and as they join together, they begin to see a different world.

Compartmentalizing Emotions

Tzaddikim have emphasized the importance of managing our emotions. However, in a time of war, it's very difficult to do so. Here are a few practical steps that can help us compartmentalize our feelings.

First of all, it is important to acknowledge that our feelings each have an appropriate place. As an analogy, if someone receives

boxes and boxes of food and *sefarim*, he can't just leave all the boxes on the floor. He won't be able to move and function in his home, and he won't be able to utilize what he has been given. He has to open the boxes, and put each item away on the appropriate shelf.

So too, in times of crisis, a person is flooded by a rush of emotions such as fear, urgent curiosity about what's happening, apprehension about the future, trying to guess what will occur, anger, worry, and so on. First and foremost, he has to realize that Hashem has created him with enough closets and shelves to store all those emotions. His task is now to place each emotion on the appropriate shelf. Otherwise, he won't be able to live and function. He won't be able to daven or learn; he'll have no day and no night.

Some people think Hashem wants us to detach ourselves from everything that is going on, disappear into a *sefer* and avoid the distraction and stress that come from caring. This approach is entirely mistaken. Rather than arranging his feelings in the appropriate closets, this person has simply thrown them out the door before sitting down to learn. Just as those boxes of food and *sefarim* are a valuable gift that shouldn't be wasted, these feelings and emotions are meant to be utilized in the right way and in the appropriate time and place.

For example, Hakadosh Baruch Hu wants a person to put some of those feelings into davening with *kavanah*. If, like so many suffering people, he feels that he can't concentrate on *Tehillim*, he should express the same feelings by simply talking to Hashem, and try to remember how close Hashem is to him, and how much Hashem helps each person.

If Not Now, When?

We also need to find ways to help others. When faced with the difficulty of deciding what to do, it is important to remember that helping another Jew is of primary importance – not only when helping Jews in far-away lands, but when helping the person who's standing

right next to you. We often don't realize that extending a helping hand to those nearby is *ahavas Yisrael* of the highest order.

Many people want to be involved with Torah, *tefillah*, mitzvos and *maasim tovim*, but hesitate because they want to choose a project that matches their personality and abilities. A similar thing happens in *shidduchim*. Ten different people have already suggested a certain *shidduch* to this *bachur* who's 25. Why haven't they met? He is still trying to decide if she is a good enough match for him or if he should hope for someone more suitable.

We find the same phenomenon in the realm of learning Torah. Someone has enthusiastically declared that he is going to start learning seriously. However, he's still trying to identify the best *sefer* to learn and the best *beis medrash* to learn in. The days slip by as he continues to consider his options.

We want to tell him, "Do yourself a favor, stop thinking, and just sit down and learn something. Later we can discuss your long-term plan. Right now, there is a *sefer* in front of you. Take it and learn! מצוה גוררת מצוה - one mitzvah will lead to the next. Take a *Chumash* and learn *Chumash* with Rashi. Just beginning to learn will help you gain clarity and make up your mind."

In our *Bitachon* series we learned that if a person does what he is able to do right now, it will open doors to the next stage. In the *shidduch* example, the young man doesn't want to look into the idea because he thinks that this *shidduch* may not 'be for him.' However, he should investigate the possibility, because right now, that is the step he is able to take in his quest for a *shidduch*. He has to do what he can, and that itself will move him closer to his goal.

Let's apply this to *ahavas Yisrael*. A person may learn about the importance of the mitzvah and enthusiastically decide to throw himself into helping others. Then he starts to ponder, "Who needs the most help? Who should be on the team? Where will we meet? Maybe we should rent an office? Maybe we should buy an office?"

Once again, I would tell this idealist: Do yourself a favor, find a Jew and give him a cup of coffee. Start helping others. If someone insults you, don't insult him in return. As you gain a true appreciation of *ahavas Yisrael*, you will find endless opportunities to benefit others.

Opening the Gates of Wisdom

In *Pirkei Avos*, Chazal say, "Who is wise? One who learns from every person." A person may understand that if he learns something from one person after another, he will increase his knowledge. However, he may not realize that without *ahavas Yisrael* he won't see the good in others, and won't be able to learn from them. This will prevent him from keeping the Torah.

Each of us is surrounded by so much good. We can learn Torah from one person, *gemilus chasadim* from another, and a new manner of *deveikus b'Hashem* from yet another. Unfortunately, rather than taking advantage of those opportunities, we might be too busy looking down on your potential benefactors. We don't want to learn from the likes of this one or that one.

You could have learned so much, but you closed your eyes.

עַת צָרָה הִיא לְיַעֲקֹב וּבִמְנוּחָה יִוָּשַׁע – *It is a time of trouble for Yaakov and he will be saved from it.* Each of us has to realize that *ahavas Yisrael* is a shield that can protect us from retribution. Jews everywhere need *yeshuos*. Now is the time to approach *ahavas Yisrael* in a deeper way, as taught by the Baal Shem Tov and his *talmidim*.

Greater Than a Malach

The *sefer Amaros Tehoros* brings a story of Rav Shmuel of Kaminka, who was with his Rebbe, Rav Moshe *HaMaggid* of Chodnov, a *talmid* of the Toldos Yaakov Yosef.

Rav Shmuel was preparing to daven *Shacharis*. In the midst of his preparations, while his *tallis* was still on his shoulder, a simple Jew approached him and asked for his help with something. Rav

Shmuel motioned with his hand, indicating, “Not now! we can speak after davening.”

The Maggid observed this interaction and called R’ Shmuel over to find out what had happened. R’ Shmuel explained.

The Maggid said, “I have a *kabbalah* from my Rebbes that in the heavens there is a *malach* with a thousand heads. Each head has a thousand mouths, and each mouth has a thousand tongues, and all of those tongues sing the praise of Hakadosh Baruch Hu. You can make the calculation; this *malach* sings far more praise than we human beings do.

“Let me ask you this. If there are such *malachim*, what significance is there to the song and praise of a Jew this world? The answer is that a Jew is far greater than a *malach* – because he can help a fellow Jew. A *malach* is unable to do that.

“Therefore, if someone helps even one Jew, and then sings to Hashem, his song will be greater than that of the *malachim*. However, if a Yid approaches you before davening and asks you for a favor, and you tell him to wait until after *tefillah*, you aren’t on a higher level than a *malach*. If so, who needs your *tefillah*?”

The Maggid concluded, “Even if you are between *geulah* and *tefillah* (between concluding the *brachah* of גאל ישראל and beginning *Shemoneh Esrei*), and you hear that a Yid needs a favor, you must interrupt your *davening* to help him.”

The Rachmistrivka Rebbe zt”l (who brought us this story in his *sefer Amaros Tehoros*) added, “I am not saying this as *halachah l’maaseh*, but I am giving over to you what I received.”

Tzedakah – Greater than Saying Tehillim

The *sefer Beis Pinchas* relates another story about Rav Shmuel of Kaminka.

In the course of his learning Rav Shmuel found a *sefer* that described the power of saying the entire *Sefer Tehillim* without interruption. He undertook to say all of *Tehillim* with tremendous *kavanah* and with no interruptions. He chose a day on which he would set aside all of his other *sedarim*, hoping to benefit from the great *madreigos* that could be reached by saying *Tehillim* in this way.

On that special day, he rose before dawn, davened in the first *minyán* and immediately sat down to say *Tehillim*. His *avodah* continued all day, and as sunset approached, he had just ten *perakim* left to complete the *sefer*. He was already beginning to feel the *simchah* of completing *Tehillim*.

Suddenly, the *gabbai* of his Rebbe, the Maggid of Chodnov, told him that the Rebbe wanted him. Rav Shmuel pointed at the *Tehillim*, indicating that he was almost finished, and that he would go to the Rebbe as soon as he was done. The *gabbai* left, but soon returned and told R' Shmuel: "The Rebbe demands that you come immediately without delaying even one moment."

R' Shmuel immediately followed the *gabbai*, but he was pained that all he had invested in completing *Tehillim* would be lost. As soon as he entered the room, the Maggid chastised him for not coming as soon as he was summoned. R' Shmuel couldn't understand why his Rebbe was so upset with him.

The Maggid explained, "There was a poor man here for *tzedakah*, and I didn't have any money. I wanted to send you out to collect some coins for him."

Rav Shmuel began to explain, "I invested so much time and effort in my attempt to say the entire *sefer Tehillim* without interruption. I was almost finished..."

The Maggid exclaimed "What do you think is more important in *Shamayim*? Your *Tehillim*, or giving a few coins to a poor man?"

You should know that giving those few coins to the poor is more important in *Shamayim*. I was upset with you because you should have understood that.”

Admittedly, in the heat of the moment it’s difficult to always make the correct decision. However, our problem is that too many times, we don’t even think about helping others, or notice those who need our help. If we truly understood that a Jew’s most powerful weapons are learning Torah *lishmah* and *gemilus chesed* to others, we would see things differently and accomplish so much!



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